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Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.
Secretary, DENR

PROJECTS GET NHTF FUNDING

Three land acquisition projects of the state parks system were granted at least partial funding by the NC Natural Heritage Trust Fund trustees at an April meeting.

Earlier this spring, state budget writers froze \$3 million of the trust fund, leaving the directors to divide a total \$5.5 million among state agencies that had requested \$15.2 million for land conservation projects.

The three grants for the NC Division of Parks and Recreation are:

—Beech Creek Bog: \$585,000, a portion of the purchase price for an environmentally sensitive mountain bog area and its watershed in Avery County. It would become the first such mountain bog represented among protected lands in the state. The division also received a grant for this project from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The acquisition is being directed through the Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust.

—Elk Knob: \$1 million toward the purchase price of a high-elevation knob in Watauga County, which could eventually qualify as a state natural area. The division had requested a \$4 million grant, and is pursuing this project with the help of The Nature Conservancy.

—Upper Cabelands Tract, Eno River State Park: \$100,000 for property near the intersection of Interstate 40 and US 70 that has been identified as a significant natural heritage area. The division had asked for a \$200,000 grant. Division officials said the remainder of the purchase price may be sought through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. There has also been a grant for this project from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.



BEECH CREEK BOG IN AVERY COUNTY IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF A MOUNTAIN BOG COMMUNITY.

Not funded in this grant cycle was a \$1.09 million request for funds to purchase two tracts bordering South Mountains State Park, one of which includes Little River Falls.

The Natural Heritage Program, which is administered by the division, was awarded \$70,000 to continue county-by-county natural area inventories. The original grant request was for \$100,000.

Faced with a trust fund that has been hit twice with budget reversions and an uncertain future, the board made all the grants contingent “on availability of funds.”

And, the board tried hard to determine the “urgency of projects,” in the words of chairman Dewey Wells. That is, those projects where the land was not immediately threatened by development or

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RANGER, SCOUTS LEARN TOGETHER

(The following is adapted from *The Waterline* newsletter of Goose Creek State Park.)

By RANGER DEBO COX
Goose Creek State Park

I had forgotten what it was like to be a cub scout – eyes full of wonder, excitement and unbridled enthusiasm. Running around with not a care in the world, but starting to realize that I was part of something bigger and more exciting that I just didn't understand yet.

Recently, I had the chance

to remember my cub scouting experience and witness in others the fulfillment and gratification that comes from giving back something meaningful to the environment. Cub Scout Pack 99, Den 3 of Washington, NC wanted a program dealing generally with natural resource management – possibly tree planting. We agreed upon a date and our staff began pulling together necessary materials.

First, we needed a good spot. Luckily, we were scheduled to burn a small plot directly in front of the environmental edu-

cation/visitor's center. The weather cooperated and we were able to burn the area within the first few days after scheduling the program. Next, the staff spent the better part of an afternoon clearing the area of brush and making it suitable for longleaf pines to take root and grow. With a generous donation by our local Weyerhaeuser nursery of about 50 longleaf pine seedlings, we were close to being ready.

The big day arrived and 15 wild-eyed boys piled out of mini-vans on cue. We spent time discussing what we were about to do, how to do it, and more importantly, why we were planting trees.

The boys split into smaller groups and I distributed seedlings. As we had discussed, perfectly proportioned holes were dug, and young trees were placed in the ground to start a new life. Every once in a while, you have moments in this job that confirm that you're doing the right thing. This was one of those moments. We were not merely talking about environmental education; we were living it.

I tell this story for two reasons. The first is that I'm a huge believer in experiential education. I believe the best way to learn something is to submerge yourself in it and soak up all that the experience has to offer. There's no better way to learn about natural resource management than going out and doing it.

Secondly, I think this program perfectly illustrates how our mission, teamwork by park staff and partnership with the community can come together to realize greater benefit with our programs than we initially appreciate. Too bad cub scouts don't sell cookies.

From The Director's Desk

Dear Fellow Employees:

I only have to glance through this month's edition of *The Steward* to know that activity in the division is slipping into a higher gear. With the warmer weather comes a surge in all facets of our work, from construction projects large and small to the number of school classes visiting our parks. It's a satisfying time of year to be in this business.

Most indicators point to the likelihood that this will be a very strong year for visitation, perhaps matching or exceeding the 12.65 million visitors to our parks and recreation areas last year. With air travel certainly not being what it used to be, most tourism officials report an increase in travel by car, which often means travel closer to home.

In addition, the state's tourism promotion efforts have shifted toward a homegrown audience with a "Discover the State You're In" campaign directed at North Carolinians. (Hammocks Beach State Park was the site of one photography shoot for the campaign.)

I look at these possibilities with excitement and confidence. Warmer weather and increased activity in our parks gives us a chance to show our best face and to show North Carolina what the division is capable of accomplishing. We can pay special attention to those aspects of our jobs that we enjoy most.

Have a safe and enjoyable season.

Sincerely,

PK

Philip K. McKnelly

PANEL OKAYS 25 TRAILS PROJECTS

By TAMARA WARD
Publications Coordinator

Members of the North Carolina Trails Committee have recommended 25 projects for a total of \$1.1 million in funding from the federal Recreational Trails Program. The seven-member committee met March 22 at DuPont State Forest.

The program is supported by federal gas taxes paid on fuel used by off-highway vehicles. The North Carolina committee has sent grant award recommendations totaling \$1.1 million to the Secretary of DENR for approval each of the past two years. The funding goes to projects that meet the state's trail and trail-related recreational needs. Grant applicants must contribute 20 percent of the project cost.

Darrell McBane, state trails coordinator, said that the committee had its work cut out for it this year. Committee members sifted through 50 applications that totaled \$2.3 million in requests.

"With such an obviously high demand for funding for trails projects, it's a challenge to select only the most qualified projects," McBane said.

After the committee's recommended projects are examined to ensure that they comply with state and federal environmental rules and regulations, they are sent to the DENR Secretary for final approval. McBane said that the process should be complete by early June.

Among the projects the trails committee recommended is the first locally-developed and managed area for off-highway vehicles in the state. The Kinston-Lenoir County project received a committee recommendation for

\$300,000 — the highest amount from the state's allocation of program funding this fiscal cycle. Federal regulations require the state to spend up to 30 percent of funding received through the Recreational Trails Program to develop and manage off-highway vehicle trails. Currently, only four areas in North Carolina offer public off-highway vehicle trails, the most eastern of which is located in the Uwharrie National Forest near Morrow Mountain State Park.



"I probably get more requests for places to ride off-highway vehicles than anything else coming into this office," McBane said. "There are very few public areas to ride. So, I feel like we've done a great thing for the citizens of this state by recommending this project for funding. And, we are very encouraged to see local departments of parks and recreation interested in developing off-highway vehicle trails."

Other unique projects that the committee recommended for funding include a \$50,000 project of The Nature Conservancy to acquire land for additional overnight camping platforms and trail signage along the Roanoke River Paddle Trail near Weldon. Be-

cause of the low-lying, swampy land, paddlers camp on raised platforms. McBane said that the black-water trail is already gaining national attention for its overnight platforms that offer visitors the chance to extend their stay in the ecologically significant area.

Another \$50,000 was recommended to fund land purchases along the Rocky River Greenway near Davidson. The land would link completed trail segments, and the funding will purchase the land needed to complete the trail. McBane said that eventually, the north/south greenway system might expand and connect to the Charlotte area or to Lake Norman State Park.

"Our legal mandate is to try to build a system of trails, and this is one part of the system of trails we're trying to create in North Carolina," he said.

The trails committee also recommended \$20,000 to buy a hydraulic loader for the Blue Ridge Bicycle Club of Brevard. A hydraulic loader is similar to a miniature bulldozer and is about four feet wide. But, instead of riding the loader, operators walk behind it. The loader could be used to assist with trail development in mountainous areas such as DuPont State Forest or Gorges State Park, McBane said.

McBane said that he is looking forward to seeing these projects come into fruition.

"I look back now on some of these projects that we've funded in the past, and it makes me proud to see people enjoying the trails for all types of users across North Carolina," he said. "When I go to a trail that was funded through this program and see people out there using it, that's when you know you're really making a difference."

ALERT TESTS: HOW RANGERS RANK

State park rangers are at about the middle of the class in physical fitness when compared to law enforcement agencies generally, according to the results of physical assessments taken this year at the Annual Law Enforcement Refresher Training (ALERT).

Statistics were compiled by Dave Cook, superintendent of Eno River State Park, who directed physical assessments for 157 rangers and superintendents during ALERT training.

The commissioned staff averaged at the 49.4 percentile, according to statistics on law enforcement agencies compiled by the Cooper Institute. This is based on the four tests common to most agencies – bench press, body fat, 1.5-mile run and sit-ups. The ranking does not factor age or gender.

Cook said that the average score in 2002 for the six tests was 53.5, down somewhat from recent years. The highest average score was 61.82 in 1999.

Individual scores are obtained by recording best efforts in the distance run, leg press, bench press, body fat composition, sit-ups and flexibility. Rangers are scored based on percentile statistics for the general United States population and take into account gender and age (broken down by decades.)

The highest score of 95.3 was posted by Superintendent Sam Bland, and it included a 1.5-mile run in eight minutes, 50 seconds.

Of five individuals scoring in the 90s, four were superintendents.

Cook said that many rangers ask how age affects the score. It is not a set difference, because it is based on objective real-life statistics, not subjective scoring. For example, Bland's marks would have scored him at 82.33 if he were in his twenties, 89.66 if he were in his thirties and 97.67 if he were in his fifties.

According to the average scores, rangers

WHAT'S GOIN' ON?

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR PARK OR DIVISION PROGRAM? THE STEWARD IS ALWAYS READY TO ACCEPT SUBMISSIONS FROM DIVISION EMPLOYEES.



RANGER BEN WUNDERLY OF HAMMOCKS BEACH TAKES HIS TURN ON THE LEG PRESS DURING THIS YEAR'S ALERT PHYSICAL ASSESSMENT TESTS.

were strongest in leg strength and dynamic strength (measured by bench press and sit-ups respectively.) Weak points were suggested by lower scores in upper body strength and body fat composition.

Some individual efforts to recognize:

- Superintendent Greg Schneider raised his score by 26 points in one year (without any age adjustment.)
- Ranger Curtis Dykstra registered a meager 7.5 percent body fat. (A note about body fat: this test scores higher for low body fat. However, generally for good health the optimal range for body fat is 10-20 percent for men and 15-25 percent for women.)
- Ranger Tonya Nifong pushed the sit-and-reach box 25 1/4 inches.
- Ranger Larry Hyde did 68 sit-ups.
- Seven people lifted 300 pounds on the bench press.
- Ninety people lifted 500 pounds on the leg press.

KERR LAKE GETTING A FACELIFT

By TAMARA WARD
Publications Coordinator

After three years of planning and design, construction is well under way on a \$1.1 million project that will revolutionize the way visitors experience Kerr Lake State Recreation Area.

Among a number of additions and improvements are an amphitheater and a fully accessible trail leading to it, and a 200-foot swim beach, the first within the park.

Most construction is taking place at Satterwhite Point, the area where the park visitor's center is located. Funded by the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, all of the construction is expected to be completed by late October.

"It's real exciting because we're really changing the day use area at Satterwhite Point," said David Coburn, Kerr Lake superintendent.

Picnic sites, a playground, a fishing pier at Henderson Point, a bathhouse, additional parking lots, and a paved road to the community building will be built in addition to the amphitheater, trail and swimming area. All the facilities will be fully accessible.

The 900-foot trail now is a muddy path winding from the visitor's center parking lot through the lakeside forest to a clearing where the amphitheater will be constructed. The trail branches off to the lakeshore where an octagonal overlook will be built.

The trail will be paved, lighted and fully accessible, and will have several stone benches along the way. There will be three exhibit areas, which Coburn said will be compatible with the



SATTERWHITE POINT WILL OFFER THE FIRST DESIGNATED SWIMMING AREA WITHIN KERR LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA.

visitor's center themes that focus on the lake environment.

Coburn said park exhibits will round out the educational material associated with the lake. The nearby U.S. Army Corps of Engineers exhibits about Kerr Lake focus on dam operation and historical development.

Seating 50 people on stone benches, the amphitheater will have a partially covered stage area that also will be lighted. With the addition of the amphitheater, the park is planning on expanding its scope of interpretive and educational programs.

"We plan on using the amphitheater for traditional park programs, but also for skits and dramas, and music," Coburn said.

Aside from the interpretive and educational draw of the new facilities, Coburn said he expects visitors also to be attracted to the first designated swimming area.

Currently, Kerr Lake visitors swim near the picnic area at Satterwhite Point or near their campsites, along grassy or rocky shorelines that are adjacent to other park amenities. The lake bottom is uneven in these

swimming areas, and swimmers are not separated from boat traffic.

The new 200-foot swim beach at Kerr Lake will give park visitors a protected area for swimming. A foot of sand was added to the beach, and sand also was added underwater to give the lake bottom a consistent grade. Depth indicators and a swim line also will make the beach a safer area for swimming.

Coburn said that the swimming area will be an appreciated addition to the park as most of the park's 1.4 million visitors last year swam in the lake.

"We think (the swim beach) will totally change the historical swimming activities at Kerr Lake," he said. "What I envision is that people with families and children, and others who don't like competing with boat traffic, will utilize this area."

A retention wall will separate the beach area from an elevated picnic area and a bathhouse. A concrete walkway to the water will provide handicapped access to the lake. The swim beach is expected to be open by Memorial Day.

INVENTORY FINDS CUMBERLAND RICH

By RICHARD LeBLOND
Natural Heritage Program

Cumberland County contains an unusually strong diversity of natural communities and rare species according to a natural area inventory just completed by the division's Natural Heritage Program.

This inventory was funded by the Sandhills Area Land Trust (SALT) and the North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund, with assistance from several public agencies, county officials, and private landowners. The inventory identified and described the natural areas in the county determined to be of national, state, regional, or county significance, and documented all natural communities and rare plants and animals.

The southeastern coastal plain and sandhills region of North Carolina together form one of the most biologically diverse areas along the Atlantic Coast north of Florida. Cumberland County is central to this area not only geographically but also biologically, as it forms a direct link between the ecosystems of the sandhills and those of the central and outer coastal plain.

Diversity of natural communities and native plants and animals results from the diversity of habitats found within its distinctive physiographic areas: the sandhills in the northwest, the Cape Fear River slopes and bluffs in the center of the county from north to south, and the Carolina bay region in the southeast.

The greatest concentration of natural areas is found in the northwest in and near Fort Bragg, where there are 17 natural areas, most of which are characterized by extensive areas of sand-

hill and streamhead habitat. Another important concentration of sites is associated with the Cape Fear River upstream NC 24, where there are nine natural areas along the slopes and bluffs of the river. Another six natural areas are associated with the Carolina bays and ancient river terraces in the southeastern part of the county.

Altogether, the inventory documented 10 sites of national significance, 14 of state significance, 14 of regional significance, and five of county significance.

The exceptional natural diversity of Cumberland County is reflected in the high number of natural community types it contains. The majority of these communities are associated with the longleaf pine and pocosin ecosystems of the sandhills region in the northwestern part of the county, and the Carolina bay area in the southeastern part of the county. The rest are associated with the floodplains, slopes, and summits along the county's riv-

ers and streams.

Among these community types and variants are a few that are rare globally, and others that are some of the best examples to be found anywhere. The Little River seepage bank and Little River bluff community types are found only near a few tributaries of the Cape Fear River from Little River south to Willis Creek. So far, these community types have not been found outside of Cumberland County and the southern edge of Harnett County. Other globally rare or restricted community types include peatland Atlantic white cedar forest and sandhill seep, with Cumberland County containing some of the best examples.

Because of this habitat diversity and species richness, there are a large number of rare plants (68) and animals (54) that are native to the county. Cumberland County contains more rare plant and animal species combined than any other county in the state save the mountains and coastal edge.

BIRDS-IN-A-NEST SURVEYED

The Natural Heritage Program has completed a range-wide status survey for a rare plant known as Carolina birds-in-a-nest or Carolina bog-mint (*Macbridea caroliniana*). The survey was conducted for the US Fish and Wildlife Service by biologists Richard LeBlond and Bruce Sorrie, and included visits to known sites in South Carolina and Georgia as well as North Carolina.

Carolina birds-in-a-nest is found primarily in blackwater stream swamps, and it flowers from July to September. The pink to lavender blossoms approach two inches in length, and are large for a member of the mint family.

A total of 54 populations range-wide were documented during the inventory, of which 36 are still current, half of them in North Carolina. Carolina birds-in-a-nest is found exclusively in the coastal plain from the Neuse River drainage to south Georgia, with the largest populations associated with the Congaree, Edisto, and Savannah rivers in South Carolina.

Although blackwater stream swamps are common, only two new populations were found during a survey of 27 potential sites, and only five of 17 historical populations were relocated.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

MARCH 2002

PARK	MARCH 2002	TOTAL YTD MAR. 2002	MARCH 2001	TOTAL YTD MAR. 2001	% CHANGE % (2001 / 2002)	
					MAR.	YTD
BOONES CAVE	3,391	6,165	3,293	6,362	3%	-3%
CAROLINA BEACH	16,128	36,138	13,893	33,942	16%	6%
CLIFFS OF THE NEUSE	8,136	17,768	6,428	15,063	27%	18%
CROWDER'S MOUNTAIN	27,437	64,160	24,504	56,196	12%	14%
ENO RIVER	25,429	65,924	24,577	63,367	3%	4%
OCCONEECHEE MOUNTAIN	2,814	7,098	3,318	8,530	-15%	-17%
FALLS LAKE	30,728	73,484	47,943	103,358	-36%	-29%
FORT FISHER	131,274	186,545	26,582	69,066	394%	170%
FORT MACON	92,792	192,586	69,434	160,084	34%	20%
GOOSE CREEK	13,995	31,386	8,018	21,631	75%	45%
GORGES	7,174	18,229	5,265	14,143	36%	29%
HAMMOCKS BEACH	11,706	26,736	7,661	21,050	53%	27%
HANGING ROCK	21,564	51,357	20,420	47,676	6%	8%
JOCKEY'S RIDGE	60,915	102,975	40,462	77,166	51%	33%
JONES LAKE	5,924	14,008	7,120	17,520	-17%	-20%
JORDAN LAKE	105,031	160,195	98,748	156,036	6%	3%
KERR LAKE	81,208	192,128	56,924	142,384	43%	35%
LAKE JAMES	17,189	33,730	16,741	32,004	3%	5%
LAKE NORMAN	26,913	58,184	11,766	27,972	129%	108%
LAKE WACCAMAW	8,572	19,024	6,524	16,784	31%	13%
LUMBER RIVER	3,025	7,275	4,100	11,623	-26%	-37%
MEDOC MOUNTAIN	3,320	8,156	4,636	9,600	-28%	-15%
MERCHANT'S MILLPOND	7,972	18,412	7,817	17,000	2%	8%
MORROW MOUNTAIN	30,760	65,980	29,760	66,800	3%	-1%
MOUNT JEFFERSON	5,683	13,766	4,424	13,112	28%	5%
MOUNT MITCHELL	14,698	24,966	7,926	16,945	85%	47%
NEW RIVER	6,316	19,880	4,968	12,804	27%	55%
PETTIGREW	4,748	11,213	6,754	15,412	-30%	-27%
PILOT MOUNTAIN	26,578	65,583	25,940	62,288	2%	5%
RAVEN ROCK	11,219	23,906	10,499	23,734	7%	1%
SINGLETARY LAKE	748	2,020	672	1,904	11%	6%
SOUTH MOUNTAINS	12,010	28,558	15,054	35,610	-20%	-20%
STONE MOUNTAIN	30,632	80,312	31,824	100,700	-4%	-20%
WEYMOUTH WOODS	2,694	6,622	2,482	5,813	9%	14%
WILLIAM B. UMSTEAD	32,274	88,815	34,605	72,567	-7%	22%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	890,997	932,287	691,082	1,556,246	29%	-40%

NHTF

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sale to private interests tended to be given a lower priority for funding.

In several cases, pledges to help purchase property from The Nature Conservancy prompted the trustees to delay funding.

Four other agencies received trust fund grants.

The Division of Forest Resources received funding for additions to Clemmons Educational State Forest and Bladen Lakes State Forest.

The Division of Cultural Resources received a grant to add property to Historic Bethania.

The Wildlife Resources Commission received partial funding for two projects, one at Shocco Creek in Franklin and Warren counties, and one for an addition to the Angola Bay gamelands in Pender County.

The Department of Agriculture received grants for an acquisition at Paddy Mountain in Ashe County and an addition to protected land in Watauga County.



GOOSE CREEK BOARDWALK EXPANDED

The staff at Goose Creek State Park recently completed construction of a new addition to the popular Palmetto Boardwalk that leads from the environmental education center. The fully accessible addition is 48 feet long with a 16 by 16-foot platform useful for interpretive programs.

PARKS HAVE CHAMPION TREES

Three trees in two of North Carolina's state parks have been listed as national champions on the 2002-03 National Register of Big Trees, compiled by the publishers of American Forest.

Pettigrew State Park owns the national champion swampbay (*Persea borbonia*

var. pubescens) and coastal plain willow (*Salix caroliniana*).

Jockey's Ridge State Park is the site of the largest northern bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*).

These trees are recognized as the largest of their species until the tree dies or another, larger tree is found.

Mission

The mission of the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation is:



to protect North Carolina's natural diversity;

to provide and promote outdoor recreation opportunities throughout North Carolina;

to exemplify and encourage good stewardship of North Carolina's natural resources

and

for all citizens and visitors of North Carolina.

The Steward

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